Fostering Religious Character Through Malam Bina Iman dan Taqwa (MABIT) Program at SMP IT Al-Ghazali Jember

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Abstract

The development of students' religious character is an essential aspect in Islamic education, especially in facing the challenges of modernization and globalization that impact the moral behaviour of the younger generation. This study aims to analyze the implementation and effectiveness of the Malam Bina Iman dan Taqwa (MABIT) program at SMP IT Al-Ghazali Jember as a strategy for fostering students' religious character. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, where data is obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The primary informants included the principal, accompanying teachers, and students from various grade levels. The triangulation technique was applied to ensure data credibility. The results showed that the MABIT program significantly improved students' daily worship discipline, independence, and responsibility. The activities in this program - including congregational worship, religious studies, group discussions, and self-muhasabah - contribute to forming stronger religious characters. The evaluation of the program shows that its effectiveness is influenced by the active involvement of teachers and parents, as well as the continuity of the activities carried out. The implications of this study indicate that character education based on direct experience is more effective than theoretical approaches, and coaching models such as MABIT need to be developed further. Recommendations include periodic evaluation of learning methods, student participation optimization, and technology integration to support program sustainability.

Introduction

Modernization and globalization significantly impact the social and moral behavior of individuals, including the younger generation. The rapid changes that occur, especially in the technology field, often make individuals lose their direction and identity, and fall into behaviors that do not follow applicable religious and social norms (Gidley, 2001; Mendrofa et al., 2024). In this context, students are often the most affected group, where moral and ethical decline is becoming increasingly apparent. Many students prioritize momentary pleasures over moral and religious values that should be upheld (Sultana & Bukhari, 2020; Fitriyah & Syarief, 2023).

Changes in Indonesian education continue to be made to improve the quality of education. However, these updates are often not balanced with strengthening the character and morals of students. One of the impacts of technological advances and increasingly flexible educational policies is the tendency of students to be carried away by freedom of exploration, which can cause moral decline. The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency, including criminal acts involving underage students, is an indication of moral decline and lack of religious character development in students (Basyaruddin & Rifma, 2020; Fathoni et. al, 2024).

In this regard, educational institutions, especially schools, are often regarded as responsible for fostering students' morals and character. Therefore, fostering student character, especially religious character, is important to education. The primary purpose of religious character development is to shape students into individuals who are noble, responsible, and beneficial to society. This religious character development involves the role of schools, families, and communities (Imamudin et al., 2022; Kamila, 2023; Bisri, 2024).

In this context, character is defined as the mindset and behavior that characterize each individual in living life, both within the scope of family, community, nation, and state. Individuals with good character are those who can make the right decisions and are ready to take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions (Erfayliana, 2017; Manaf, 2019). Character building is the main goal in national education, as stated in Article 1 of the 2003 National Education System Law, which states that national education aims to develop students' potential in intelligence, personality, and noble character (Ilham, 2019). The Big Indonesian Dictionary defines character as character, psychological traits, morals, or character traits that distinguish a person from others. This character can be formed through various factors, including the family and school environment (Nerizka et al., 2021).

Religious character is one of the important components that must be developed early on. It is because religious teachings are the basis that governs every aspect of individual life, society, nation, and state, especially in Indonesia. Religious character is reflected in one's faith and piety, which is manifested through daily attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Individuals with a religious character will become a person of faith, piety, noble character, and a good citizen (Sa'adah & Pamungkas, 2022). However, the fragility of character and moral degradation among students

is a serious problem that must be addressed immediately. One of the causes is the lack of adequate religious character development in the family, school, and community environment. As a result, students often show negative behavior such as a lack of respect for parents, disobeying religious rules, and deviating from prevailing universal values (Ngadhimah et al., 2023).

Religious character development is a planned and conscious process that aims to form students' personal beliefs, piety, and noble character in accordance with the teachings of the religion they believe in. This process involves efforts to instill religious values in students so that these values become an integral part of their personality (Abidin et al., 2024). Religious character development is not only important in the context of personal students, but also for society as a whole, because religious individuals tend to be more tolerant, respectful, caring for others, and can be a bulwark against negative behaviors such as drugs, violence, and juvenile delinquency (Risdiany & Dewi, 2021).

One of the efforts that can be made to foster students' religious character is through the Malam Bina Iman dan Taqwa (MABIT) program. MABIT is a tarbiyah program designed to increase students' faith, piety, and noble character. This activity is generally carried out in a group form, such as in schools or pesantren, focusing on worship, religious studies, and self-muhasabah (Sari et al., 2024). This program has been implemented at SMP Islam Terpadu (SMP IT) Al-Ghazali Jember since 2018 and continues to grow until now. The main objective of the MABIT program is to strengthen students' religious character as part of the formation of the Pancasila profile and the religious character expected of each student.

Research on implementing the MABIT Program in religious education in various schools shows that this program has a significant influence on developing students' religious character. Astuti et al., in their research, explained that implementing MABIT activities is instrumental in improving students' spiritual intelligence. It can be seen from students' high level of activity in participating in various MABIT activities, which include worship activities such as congregational prayers, muhasabah, and religious studies. This study also found that the supporting factors that play an important role in the successful implementation of this program are the good cooperation between teachers, parents, and students, and the availability of a place and time conducive to implementing activities. However, the challenge faced is that some students are less enthusiastic about participating in the entire MABIT activities, which sometimes leads to absence or inactivity in some activity sessions (Astuti et al., 2023).

In line with these findings, Winarsih and Ruwandi's study also found that MABIT was organized according to the school's vision and mission, which had been structured. In this case, MABIT activities are organized by the principal, the religious and student affairs divisions, and the teachers involved. MABIT is usually held on weekends, from Saturday to Sunday, with programs such as congregational prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, *muhasabah*, and *qiyamul lail*. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, MABIT was implemented online with customized activities such as congregational prayers at home, muhasabah, and recitation of the Qur'an. In

this study, an evaluation was also carried out using a reward and punishment system to strengthen students' aqidah and morals. However, the obstacles often found are parents' lack of awareness in supervising their children and the difficulty in waking up children at a predetermined time. The solution proposed by Winarsih and Ruwandi is to increase parental and teacher supervision and conduct further socialization about the importance of MABIT (Winarsih & Ruwandi, 2022).

In addition, Fityassaludi and Anwar's research revealed that MABIT not only focuses on students' cognitive domains through religious lectures and integrated Islamic studies but can also strengthen students' affective and psychomotor domains. This program has been proven to form a religious attitude and accustom students to carry out congregational prayers regularly. This activity also helps strengthen students' understanding of the importance of religious values in their daily lives and provides a foundation for better character building (Fityassaludi & Anwar, 2023).

Hidayat et al.'s research also added that good planning in MABIT activities can make it easier for students to memorize the Qur'an. The MABIT program, implemented clearly in problem formulation, implementation, memorization targets, and evaluation, provides space for students to focus on memorizing Al-Qur'an verses with structured guidance. It shows that MABIT can run effectively if supported by careful planning (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, Rizal and Muzammil's research illustrates that MABIT activities carried out at MAN Model include various activities such as congregational prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, self-muhasabah, qiyamul lail, and ar-Riyadhah (sports). All of these activities aim to form students' religious character based on Islamic values that reflect the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. In this study, students' religious character is strengthened through activities emphasizing exemplary, discipline, and habituation in performing worship (Rizal & Muzammil, 2020).

Rosidatun's research also states that teachers' roles as educators, motivators, and facilitators are influential in improving students' morals through MABIT activities. The supporting and inhibiting factors found in this study vary greatly, ranging from family factors, teachers, and schools to the time of activity implementation. Teachers involved in this program play an important role in motivating students to be more active in MABIT activities and strengthening a more harmonious relationship between students, teachers, and parents (Rosidatun, 2018).

Sari et al.'s research found that MABIT activities carried out every week with materials such as Al-Qur'an tartil, tilawah, mujadara, and sports aim to shape students' morals. The moral values internalized through this activity include social care, independence, honesty, responsibility, and discipline, which are important in forming students' religious character (Sari et al., 2024).

This research is in line with previous studies but is more focused on strengthening religious character in early adolescent students through an exploration of the implementation of the MABIT program at SMP IT Al-Ghazali Jember and an analysis of its effectiveness..

Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach aims to explore and understand the meaning contained in social phenomena, using various forms of data, such as writings, images, speech, and actions of individuals or groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Haki et al., 2024). The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the complex dynamics of a particular event in depth and thoroughly (Yin, 2011).

This research focuses on the implementation and effectiveness of religious character education through the MABIT program at SMP IT Al-Ghazali Jember. The selection of the research location is based on several main considerations, namely the relevance of the MABIT program to the research objectives, the affordability of data, and the diversity of subjects that allow comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon studied.

The data in this study fall into two main categories: primary and secondary. Primary data includes information obtained directly from the main informants: the principal, subject teachers, student affairs teachers, and students from grades VII, VIII, and IX. In addition to interviews with key informants, primary data were also collected from documentation in the form of attendance lists, student attendance, and photographs taken during the research process. Meanwhile, secondary data complements and contextualizes primary data, with sources in the form of institutional documents and relevant literature that provide additional perspectives on the research results.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in a structured manner to obtain more focused information in accordance with the research objectives. Observation was used to capture the empirical dynamics in the implementation of MABIT by paying attention to the conditions, interactions, and activities that took place. Meanwhile, documentation is a complementary method to strengthen the results of interviews and observations through various written and visual evidence.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied the triangulation technique, a validation strategy that verifies information through various sources or different points of view. Triangulation serves as a mechanism for testing the credibility of data by confirming it through diverse externalities, so the accuracy of the findings can be guaranteed and does not depend on one dimension alone (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024).

In terms of data analysis, this research refers to the interactive analysis model developed by Miles et al. (2014). This model emphasizes an analytical process that occurs continuously from the early stages to the end of the research. This process consists of three main stages: First, data condensation. That is, the stage of sorting and filtering data based on relevance and significance to the research objectives. Non-essential data is eliminated, while important data is organized more structured to facilitate the next stage.

Second is data presentation, where condensed information is organized systematically to clearly illustrate the pattern of findings, facilitating deeper analysis. Third, verification and conclusion. The final stage tests and validates the analysis's results by comparing the data obtained with relevant theories and reviewing the findings to ensure consistency and accuracy of the research results.

Results

The Implementation of the MABIT Program

Conceptual Foundation of the Program

The implementation of the MABIT program at SMP IT Al-Ghazali Jember is based on the understanding that religious character education can not only be achieved through teaching in the classroom, but also through accompanying activities outside of class hours. This concept is rooted in the belief that learning through direct experience and intensive social interaction can build deep spiritual character. In this program, the main goal is to increase students' faith and devotion through a series of worship activities- congregational prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, *dhikr*, and *tadarus*- carried out on an ongoing basis. Social values, such as cooperation, discipline, and responsibility, are also instilled through group discussion activities and active participation of students in daily activities. Thus, the MABIT program is seen as a strategic effort to create a learning environment that supports holistic character building.

Stages of Implementation of the MABIT Program

The MABIT program has been integrated into the school's academic calendar in a structured manner. The following are the stages observed in the implementation of the activity:

First, registration and identification of participants. Every student is required to register as a prerequisite for participation. This process serves not only to record participation, but also to identify the potential and needs of each student so that assistance can be targeted. Registration is also an initial form of orientation to the existence of a program that involves the entire school community.

Second, a series of congregational worship and religious activities. The core activities of MABIT begin with a series of congregational worship, which includes dawn prayers, dhikr,

recitation of the Qur'an, and *tadarus*. This activity is carried out in the morning and at night, to get students used to managing time and feeling solemnity in every worship. In addition, emphasis is given to learning about the procedures for worship and understanding Islamic values in depth.

Third, the delivery of religious material is based on the level. Religious materials are arranged progressively according to grade level. For seventh-grade students, the materials include introducing concepts such as shirk, *ta'awun*, sincerity to fate, and halal-haram basics.

In class VIII, the material is directed at strengthening gratitude, introducing the procedures for dhikr and recitation in more depth, and discussing the value of *qonaah* and emotional control.

While in class IX, the material presented is applicable and in-depth, with topics such as the meaning of shahada, the danger of shirk, intensive worship strategies, and the formation of manners in everyday life. The selection of this tiered material is designed to align with students' cognitive and spiritual development, so that the values taught can be internalized optimally.

Fourth, discussion activities and presentation of the results. After delivering the material through lectures, students are divided into discussion groups. Group discussions are a means to educate students to be able to analyze, conclude, and restate religious material innovatively and communicatively. The discussion results are then presented in front of classmates, creating a conducive atmosphere for dialogue between students and improving speaking and critical thinking skills.

Finally, supporting social and physical activities. To balance the spiritual and physical aspects, the MABIT program also includes physical activities such as gymnastics together, environmental cleaning activities, and eating together. These physical activities enable students to develop healthy habits, learn discipline through routine, and internalize social values such as cooperation and integrity through group activities.

Synergy and Role of Stakeholders in Implementation

The successful implementation of MABIT cannot be separated from the synergy between various elements in the school environment, namely:

First, the Principal and Vice Principal for Student Affairs. The school management shows high commitment by encouraging all components to support the MABIT program. The principal consistently argues that this activity is an integral part of student character building, so that the program architecture is adjusted to the educational vision and mission oriented towards fostering religious and social values.

Second, mentor teachers and religious teachers. The accompanying teachers act as facilitators, mentors, and motivators during the activities. They deliver the material, observe

changes in students' attitudes, and provide constructive feedback. In addition, religious teachers organize relevant and applicable materials so that religious values are not merely theoretical but can be applied in everyday life.

Third, Parents. Parents also provide moral support through supervision at home and communication with the school regarding children's development. Coordination between the school and parents is strengthened through regular meetings and program socialization, so a synergy is formed that supports students' loyalty to the values taught.

Fourth, Learners. Students are positioned as the leading actors in the character-building process. By being allowed to present the results of discussions, organize group activities, and self-evaluate changes in attitude and behavior, students learn to take responsibility for their personal development.

Overall, the implementation of the MABIT program takes place in an integrated manner and involves all stakeholders, so this holistic approach can create a deep learning experience to form a complete religious character.

The Effectiveness of The MABIT Program

Key Indicators of Program Effectiveness

From the results of internal evaluation and observation, several indicators underline the effectiveness of the MABIT program in fostering religious character, among others:

First, an increase in the intensity of worship and time discipline. Students who participate in MABIT activities show increased consistency in the implementation of worship in the school environment and at home. It can be seen from the regular attendance of congregational prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, and dhikr at a predetermined time. Time discipline in the implementation of worship is an important indicator reflecting the internalization of Islamic values.

Second, the formation of noble character. The evaluation revealed that values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and cooperation increasingly dominate students' attitudes. Discussion activities that implement the exposure of Islamic values in an applicable manner help students develop noble character so that a pattern of behavior consistent with Islamic moral principles is formed.

Third, independence and decision-making ability. Through active participation in the registration process, discussions, and group activities, students began to show increased independence and sharpness in making decisions. This independence is evident from the activity in MABIT activities and reflects the mental readiness to apply religious values in daily life.

Fourth, the integration of social values and national education. The MABIT program integrates religious values with civic education, especially strengthening Pancasila values. It creates awareness that applying Islamic values can be the foundation for creating a harmonious, united, and civilized society. Group discussions and social activities also contribute to fostering a spirit of unity and cooperation.

Evaluation of Changes in Participants' Attitudes and Behavior

Based on the unstructured evaluation method conducted by the facilitators and teachers, several positive findings show fundamental changes in student character and behavior:

First, the transformation of spiritual attitudes. Observations indicate that after participating in a series of MABIT activities, students become more diligent and more aware of the importance of worship. Regularly following the congregational worship schedule not only affects students' mood during activities, but also improves the quality of solemnity and gratitude for the blessings obtained.

Second, changes in social behavior. Students' involvement in group activities such as joint gymnastics, community service, and cleaning shows an increased spirit of cooperation and concern for the environment. Observations of social interactions among students revealed a shift in attitude, where they were more open to working together, respecting different opinions, and showing empathy for each other.

Third, there was an increase in personal and group responsibility. The evaluation also showed that participation in administrative activities, such as registration, as well as the conduct of group discussions, led to an increase in personal responsibility. Students begin to realize the importance of active involvement in the learning process, so they have a significant role and contribution in forming religious and social character.

Fourth, feedback from parents and teachers. Positive responses from parents and teachers are also important indicators of the success of the MABIT program. Parents report changes in their children's attitudes that are increasingly disciplined, responsive to the school's values, and responsive to the values of the school's religion, and show increased confidence in expressing opinions. Teachers, through daily observations, stated that MABIT activities do not merely improve academic skills, but also optimize students' spiritual and emotional dimensions.

Implementation Barriers and Improvement Efforts

Although the MABIT program showed several positive impacts, this study also revealed several obstacles that hindered the smooth implementation, including:

First is the variability of student interest and attendance. There is an attendance dynamic where some students sometimes show fluctuating interest in participating in activities. Fatigue, busy academic schedules, or even inconvenience at implementation (for example, on Saturdays and Sundays) were some of the leading causes. This lack of enthusiasm sometimes interferes with the smooth transition from theoretical concepts to actual practice.

Second, time and funding constraints. The program's implementation, which had to be aligned with academic worksheets, meant limited time was available for each activity. In addition, limited funds for the provision of multimedia equipment and supporting facilities also hinder the optimization of the delivery of religious material through innovative methods.

Third, the consistency of the presence of assistants and teachers. The consistency of the companion's presence, especially in dense and sudden activities, is a challenge in itself. If the mentors or teachers are not fully present in every activity, the quality of mentoring and transferring religious values tends to be disrupted.

To overcome these obstacles, the school has made several improvement efforts, among others:

First, developing more interactive methods. Teachers and assistants develop delivery methods involving multimedia equipment and more varied group-based activities to motivate students to actively participate.

Second, developing a more flexible schedule. Efforts are made to adjust the MABIT implementation schedule so that activities do not interfere with core learning hours and allow students to rest while actively participating.

Finally, collaboration with communities and parents. Through socialization programs, collaboration with local communities, and strengthening communication with parents, the school seeks to create a supportive environment that strengthens the religious values taught in the MABIT program.

Discussion

The results of the above research reveal that the MABIT program significantly shapes students' religious character, especially in worship discipline, independence, and social and caring attitudes. These findings corroborate previous studies highlighting the effectiveness of spiritual experience-based education in shaping students' moral awareness.

First, a study conducted by Sari et al. found that spiritual experience-based education, such as strengthening worship activities and religious discussions, significantly increased students' moral awareness and discipline (Sari et al., 2024). In the context of the MABIT program, the habit of congregational worship, recitation, and *tadarus* Al-Qur'an is a central aspect that builds discipline and diligence in carrying out religious teachings. It is also in line

with the research of Hidayat et al., which states that consistently implementing religious coaching programs can strengthen students' commitment to Islamic values and improve more harmonious social interactions (Hidayat et al., 2024).

This finding is directly relevant to this study's results, where group discussion activities and the presentation of learning outcomes in MABIT act as a medium of reflection for students in understanding Islamic values more deeply. This approach improves students' cognitive understanding and forms an attitude of empathy and mutual cooperation, which is an integral part of Islamic character.

Secondly, the findings of this study also show that the discipline of worship is the leading indicator of the success of the MABIT program. The program focuses on the ritual aspect and contributes to building the values of leadership, patience, and independence in students' daily lives. This study's results align with many previous studies on the effectiveness of congregational worship programs in religious character building. Their studies found that students' involvement in collective worship has a positive impact on the formation of disciplinary habits, an increased sense of responsibility, as well as spiritual awareness (Putri et al., 2023; Zahra' & Sofa, 2024; Bisri, 2024; Aviyah & Salahuddin, 2024). Thus, the MABIT program not only strengthens individual worship practices but also shapes a more holistic religious character.

Third, this study's findings on the MABIT program that integrates worship, discussion, and social activities as a unified character-building process align with studies conducted by many previous researchers. They found that learning approaches that integrate spiritual aspects with social engagement produce long-term impacts on students' moral awareness (Suhayat et al., 2023; Dahirin & Rusmin, 2024; Warsah et al., 2024; Juwairiyah & Fanani, 2025). Thus, this program is not just a religious activity, but also forms a reflective mindset that connects Islamic values with students' social lives.

Overall, the relevance between the results of this study and various previous studies further strengthens the premise that religious character education based on direct experience is more effective than theoretical approaches alone. Character education that emphasizes spiritual experience can produce stronger internalization of moral values and develop more empathetic and collaborative social attitudes.

Theoretically, the MABIT program is consistent with the concept of character education, which emphasizes the internalization of moral values through direct experience. One of the relevant theories is Character Education Theory, which states that character education should integrate moral values in daily life through habits and reflection. In the context of the MABIT program, worship experiences, group discussions, and social interactions serve as holistic character-building tools (Lickona, 1991).

Furthermore, according to Al-Ghazâli, character education cannot be separated from repeated spiritual exercises (Al-Ghazâli, 2005). The MABIT program is based on this principle.

It is implemented by accustoming students to recitation, dhikr, and congregational prayers to habituate religious values in their lives. With structured activities, students understand moral values and live and internalize them in their daily behavior.

The learning model in the MABIT program is also relevant to the Sociocultural Learning theory, which states that learning occurs through meaningful social interactions, where learners are allowed to dialogue, discuss, and analyze moral concepts collectively (Vygotsky, 1978). It can be seen in the MABIT program, which combines strengthening spiritual values with social interaction, so that students learn about religion and how to apply it in social life.

The Experiential Learning approach developed by Kolb also provides relevance to the results of this study. This theory asserts that learning occurs through reflection and interaction on direct experience (Kolb, 1984). In the context of MABIT, students gain a deeper understanding of Islamic values through structured worship practices, reflection-based dialogue, and authentic social experiences.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the Malam Bina Iman dan Taqwa (MABIT) program at Al-Ghazali Jember Integrated Islamic Junior High School is effective in shaping students' religious character through a series of worship activities, group discussions, and systematic social habituation. The program has proven to improve students' worship discipline, independence, leadership, and responsibility values, directly contributing to a stronger religious character.

The success of MABIT lies not only in the intensity of worship practices but also in how the program encourages the internalization of religious values into students' daily lives. Habituation in congregational prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, and *muhasabah* create a holistic and reflection-based learning experience. In addition, social interaction in discussion activities and group work strengthens cooperation, caring, and discipline attitudes.

The implication of this study shows that religious character education is not enough to be theory-based. However, it must be integrated with a direct experience approach that encourages students' active involvement. Therefore, educational institutions must consider developing an experience-based character development model, especially by strengthening the synergy between the school, teachers, parents, and the community.

As a recommendation, it is necessary to continuously evaluate the MABIT program, including improving interactive learning methods, flexibility of activity schedules, and optimizing student participation. Further research can explore the long-term effects of this program on students' religious character formation, so it can serve as a model for other Islamic schools that want to implement a similar approach in character education.

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